

The High Calling of Being a Deacon

Acts 6:1-6; Phil.2:5-8

"And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit [and six others and the apostles prayed and laid their hands on them." (Acts 5...6).

This is a great privilege indeed today to have a share in the installation (or ordination) of two deacons. The office of deacon (which you now hold) is very old, and very honorable. It stretches back almost 2000 years to the 6th chapter of the Book of Acts. It is an honor, but more than that it is a responsibility, and that responsibility is suggested in the name "deacon". Deacon comes from the Greek word for "servant".

So <sup>DON'T</sup> let no deacon get too proud of that title. It does not mean king, it means servant. But at the same time, don't let anyone call it a lesser honor. It was one of the titles that Jesus chose for himself. He did not come as a king. Jesus was greater than any King, he was God, but he came to earth to save us as a servant. "He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant... he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even to death on a cross...(Phil.2 6 f.)" And that is what "deacon" means, the high, high calling of becoming a servant for Jesus, and for this church.

To you, then, as deacons by the grace of God and servant of Jesus Christ by the choosing of His church, I want to say three things: Be prepared. Trust in God. And don't hold anything back.

I. First, be prepared. I'm not speaking of academic preparation here. Deacons don't have to go to seminary. I'm speaking of something more important than that. Deacons must be spiritually prepared. They must be men or women with deep spiritual resources, as when God speaking through the prophet Samuel (I Sam. 7:3), said, "Prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only".

Spiritual preparation is hard work. Not all will be able to work as hard at it as some of the great saints of the church--Chrysostom, for example, who read through the Epistle to the Romans

every day of his adult life so that he would be prepared in the Word of God; or St. Francis who used to stay up all night to read the Bible pray. Not many have the time or discipline for such extremes of preparation. But every deacon can find some time to read the Bible and pray. You must be examples to the congregation of the importance of Bible study, the importance of taking some time each day to be alone with God in prayer. A deacon must be prepared.

II. Second, trust in God. No matter how hard a deacon works to be prepared, always remember that it is not our strength or our preparation that wins the victory in the Christian life. The power for that comes from God. As Paul says to the Philippians, "It is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). In everything officers of the congregations try to do, they must learn to rely not on themselves, but on God.

Some time ago I heard of two very successful African evangelists. Their work was a combination of evangelism and acting as deacons. Wherever they went they told people about Jesus, but they also, because they were deacons, were concerned about the physical needs of the people, who in that part of Africa were very poor and hungry and plagued by diseases. They became very successful. But what was the secret of your success? Was it their eloquence in telling the people the good news about Jesus Christ? Was it their love and compassion for the poor and needy? No, the secret was not in themselves at all. This is what they said when people asked them why so many people believed and wanted to join the church. They said, "We did not begin to talk about Jesus, and we did not begin to feed the poor and try to help the sick, until we had called for the power of God. That power came. We took it, and went forth with the good news of Jesus Christ. And people came confessing Jesus like the fish of the sea in number." Deacons, like any Christians in fact, must trust not in themselves, but in the power of God.

III. Finally, deacons must give themselves completely to the service of Jesus Christ. Jesus came as a servant. He gave himself <sup>up</sup> to die. How significant it is that the first martyr mentioned in the Bible, the first follower of Jesus to die for Jesus, was a deacon, <sup>Stephen</sup> Stephen was the first of the seven deacons named in the 6th chapter of the Book of Acts. It was his death by stoning that so impressed a young scholar named Saul, who was watching, that it led to Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, and Saul the persecutor became Paul the Apostle. Many ministers have been led into full time ministry by the example of godly deacons.

If the work of a deacon is worth doing at all, it is worth doing with all you have, like Stephen the deacon who gave his own life <sup>up</sup> for Jesus. Christians today have difficulty turning over all our lives to Jesus. Sometimes, even the communists outdo us in total commitment to their cause. There is a dramatic story told of the early days of the Spanish Civil War. When news of the Fascist uprisings reached Barcelona, which had chosen to stand with the communists, factory whistles all over the city began to blow. In the gray dawn, while the street lights were still burning, one whistle sounded, then another, then a hundred, steadily, mournfully, as in the old days the church bells clamoured together in times of peril. Fascist troops were marching on the center of the city. They held the big central hotel. Two field guns protected the building, and before the guns were soldiers with machine guns and rifles, sweeping the wide avenue from end to end. As the tumult of the the whistles died, two black Cadillacs, driven by Communist defenders of the city, zig-zagged madely up the street toward the guns, at 70 mph, horns screaming. Like monstrous torpedos they plowed through the lines of soldiers, charged the gun crews, and piled into the wall beside them in black, blood-spattered heaps of wreckage. The two drivers were dead, but the fascist guns were silenced.

Those two men were fighting for a false cause, a lost cause. But they gave it all they had. Like their more recent



parallels, the Muslim fanatics of the terrorist suicide bombings, they gave up their very lives. They held nothing back. Can we Christians, like these deacons, who are now giving themselves to the service of God and his Church, do any less?

Be prepared. Trust in God. And hold nothing back. Then the Holy Spirit Himself will bless you as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ who left heaven to come to earth as a servant, a <sup>us</sup> ~~servant~~ <sup>deacon</sup> who was willing to die for you on the cross.

- Samuel Hugh Moffett

## DEACONS

A. A. Jumper - Chosen to Serve (1961)

"The office which you now hold is an old one, with a long and humble history" - stretching back to the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of Acts "It came into being through the inspiration of the H.S. and was motivated by necessity." - p. 11

It is a high honor - but it does not call you to pride - it is a clear, high call to service. The word "deacon" - means "servant" - And remember that ~~all of Christ's people~~ Jesus Christ himself came not as a king, but a servant. Phil. 2, ~~in that way~~. It's a special calling - you are no longer laymen (as commonly understood) - you are ordained.

You have been chosen - chosen to serve - This is how Jesus put it - "You did not choose me, but I chose you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide..." (John 15:16).

A model - it gives the other members of the congregation an example of what it means to ~~love God and~~ keep the 2 great commandments - love God, and love your neighbor -

One of the first deacons was a manly - Stephen.

Another was an evangelist - Philip -

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The High Calling of a Deacon: Summary  
(Acts 6:1-5a; Phil. 2:5-7a)

The office of deacon is very old, and very honorable. It stretches back almost 2000 years to the 6th chapter of the Book of Acts. But it is more than an honor, it is a responsibility.

The responsibility is suggested in the name, deacon, which means servant. So don't get too proud. Deacon does not mean king, it means servant. But don't let anyone call it "low" or "unworthy". It was one of the titles that Jesus chose for himself. Jesus was greater than any king; he was God, but he came to earth to save us as a servant, a "deacon". That's what deacon means: a the high calling of becoming a servant for Jesus, and His church.

I must be brief, so let me say just three things that deacons must be ready to do: 1. Be prepared. 2. Trust in God. and 3. Don't hold anything back.

1. Be Prepared. Not academic preparation--deacons don't have to go to seminary. Deacons must be spiritually prepared, which is more important. And that takes hard work. Perhaps not quite like Chrysostom who read Paul's Romans every day of his life; or St. Francis who stayed up all night to read the Bible and pray. But every deacon can find some time each day to read the Bible & pray.

2. Trust in God. No matter how hard a deacon works to be prepared, remember that it is not our strength or preparation that wins. The power must come from God... Two African deacons, very successful, said their secret was not just telling people the gospel, or compassion for the poor and needy (which is a high priority for deacons). No. They said, "We did not begin to talk about Jesus, or try to feed the hungry, until we had called for the power of God. That power came. We took it. And people came confessing Jesus like the fish in the sea in number."

3. Don't Hold Anything Back. Deacons must give themselves completely to the service of Jesus Christ. Jesus came as a servant. The very first Christian martyr, Stephen, was a deacon. If the work of a deacon is worth doing at all, it is worth doing with all you have.

It may not be easy. But if communists and Muslim fundamentalists can give themselves so completely to falsehoods, why can't we Christians do as much for Jesus Christ who died for us. (Illustration: Communist uprising in Barcelona against a Fascist dictator--charging the guns, giving up their lives). They gave it all they had. They held nothing back. Deacons, too, must be prepared, hold nothing back, and trust in God, through the Holy Spirit, to bless your diaconate as servants of Jesus Christ and His church. Remember the hundreds, perhaps thousands of deacons in Korea, who gave their lives for Christ in the great persecutions.